

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 07 TEL AVIV 001575

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO
E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [1](#)1. March 11 Madrid Bombings
- [1](#)2. Mideast

Key stories in the media:

All media -- except Ha'aretz (English Ed.) -- led with the multiple, almost simultaneous bombings in Madrid on Thursday morning, in which 198 people were killed and over 1400 others were wounded, according to the Spanish government. Yediot's banner reads: "In Europe, Too." The media reported that the London-based Arabic-language Al-Quds Al-Arabi received an e-mailed claim of responsibility from Al Qaida, which allegedly states that the organization has infiltrated "the heart of crusader Europe" and completed its preparations for terrorist attacks in the U.S. Israel Radio reported that, like UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Secretary of State Colin Powell initially endorsed the Spanish government's assertion that the Basque guerrilla group ETA is behind the attacks, but that the U.S. Administration became open to other options following the Al-Qaida announcement. Jerusalem Post cited PM Sharon's expression of "deep grief" over the attack. Ha'aretz notes that FM Silvan Shalom also sent his condolences to the government and people of Spain. Leading media reported that Israel is prepared to send aid in various forms to Spain. Israel Radio reported that, due to a lack of need, the Spanish authorities declined an offer by an Israeli forensic team to travel to Madrid to help in identifying the dead.

Leading media reported on Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz's meetings in Washington Thursday and today with Secretary Powell, Vice President Dick Cheney, Defense

SIPDIS
Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and National Security Advisor

SIPDIS
Condoleezza Rice. Israel Radio and Maariv reported that Mofaz asked for U.S. support for Sharon's disengagement plan, saying that this support is important for him (Maariv), and for the Palestinians, the Arab states and the EU (Israel Radio). Maariv and Israel Radio reported that Mofaz told the senior U.S. officials he met Thursday that the conflict with the Palestinians could last for years and Israel must organize toward that possibility, because there is no partner on the Palestinian side. Maariv reported that Mofaz told the U.S. officials: "Israel is looking toward a historic move" and "The moment there is a partner for dialogue, we will resume the negotiations with the Palestinians." Israel Radio's Washington correspondent said: "The Americans know the Likud well, the disengagement plan a little less." The radio also reported that Immigrant Absorption Minister Tzippi Livni (Likud) met with NSA Rice.

The media reported that Thursday Sharon and other Israeli officials, including his senior aides Giora Eiland and Dov Weisglass, met with the three U.S. envoys -- Stephen Hadley and Elliott Abrams from the White House and William Burns from the State Department -- and that the meetings will continue today. Israel Radio reported that FM Shalom met with the U.S. envoys this morning. Yediot and other media reported that Sharon told the American officials that he conditions a substantial withdrawal from the West Bank upon a U.S. agreement to the annexation by Israel of settlement blocks in the West Bank. Jerusalem Post quoted a

senior diplomatic official as saying Thursday that Israel is seeking written assurances from the U.S. on the issue.

Ha'aretz reported that Sharon is considering restricting his disengagement plan to the Gaza Strip only, without a concomitant withdrawal from the West Bank, in light of the growing opposition to the plan among Likud ministers. The newspaper says that Sharon will explore this possibility in the next few days, as well as the alternative of a small, purely symbolic withdrawal from the West Bank. Ha'aretz and other media noted that both the U.S. and Egypt have said they will not support the plan unless it includes a significant withdrawal from the West Bank. Leading media quoted DAS David Satterfield as saying Thursday that one of the biggest questions is the scope of the planned withdrawal from the West Bank. Satterfield also spoke about Israel's "humiliation" of the Palestinians.

Maariv divulged further details about the outline of Israel's National Security Council disengagement plan. Yediot reported that the council has raised the idea of selling the Gaza Strip settlements to the World Bank. Maariv cited the right-wing weekly Makor Rishon, as quoting, in its latest issue coming out today, a senior source as saying that the evacuation of settlers and IDF soldiers from the Gush Katif bloc of settlements in the West Bank will start on May 1.

Leading media reported that at his meeting with FM Shalom in Cairo Thursday, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak promised to secure the border with Israel with Egyptian border police. Mubarak repeated this assurance in interviews with the regional correspondents of the three Israeli TV channels. Mubarak emphasized that any unilateral move should be made in accordance with the road map. Maariv reported that Mubarak will send two delegates to the Knesset ceremony marking the 25th anniversary of the Israel-Egypt peace treaty -- former ambassador to Tel Aviv Mohammed Bassiouny and Mustapha Faki, the Chairman of the Egyptian Senate's Foreign Affairs Committee. Hatzofe reported that the Cairo Opera has been presenting for some time an inciting anti-American production.

Jerusalem Post reported that Thursday the High Court extended a freeze on the construction of a section of the security fence northwest of Jerusalem for another six days, pending a hearing on a petition lodged by Palestinian villagers in the area.

Maariv reported that the defense establishment is considering immunizing Israelis against smallpox, and that the Home Front Command could recommend that Israelis get small and inexpensive masks granting a 20-minute protection period from chemical and biological materials.

Ha'aretz reported that a delegation of Likud members met with senior Jordanian officials at the Movenpick hotel, on the Jordanian shore of the Dead Sea, where the Geneva Accord had been drafted. The Jordanians reportedly asked the Likud members to tell Sharon that Jordan views a public announcement by Israel that Jordan is not the country of the Palestinians as extremely important. Ha'aretz quoted Deputy Employment, Industry and Trade Minister Michael Ratzon, who took part in the talks, as saying that the Left does not have a monopoly on dialogue initiatives.

All media reported that the police have arrested a possible fourth member of the "new Jewish terror underground" that planned and carried out attacks against Israeli Arabs in the Haifa area -- Alexander Rabinovich, 22, from Haifa.

Ha'aretz reported that under new legislation awaiting approval from the U.S. Senate (an amendment to Title VI of the Higher Education Act, already passed by the House of Representatives), researchers from all over the world -- including Israel -- could be asked to present their positions on U.S. policy before participating in advanced studies programs at U.S. universities.

Ha'aretz reported that at a meeting last week with ministers and representatives of agencies involved with immigration, Sharon stated his goal of bringing 1 million Jews to Israel in the next few years.

11. March 11 Madrid Bombings:

Summary:

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote on page one of independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Anyone who objects to what the terrorists did Thursday in Madrid cannot at the same time justify or overlook similar acts of terror against other nations."

Chief Economic Editor and senior columnist Sever Plotker wrote on page one of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Western Europe, for some reason, thought itself protected."

Foreign News Editor Arik Bachar wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "Thursday, Spain joined the expanding club of victims of mega-terrorism."

Block Quotes:

I. "Madrid Is Not the End of Terrorism's Road"

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote on page one of independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (March 12): "Whether Thursday's terrorist attack in Madrid was the work of the Basque underground or of another terrorist organization, such as Al Qaida -- or perhaps even a collaborative effort -- it is clear that the massacre at the train station in Spain's capital was modeled after acts by Al-Qaida, Hamas, Islamic Jihad and their ilk: a massive terror attack against innocent civilians in the name of an ideology or political demand.... Israelis can empathize with the horror and anguish experienced yesterday by residents of Madrid. The irony is that the Spanish media has for the last several years shown 'understanding' for Palestinian attacks on Israeli civilians in public places, on buses and in railway stations, and has even justified such attacks. But no political demand, however justified it might be, justifies such acts of mass murder.... Thus anyone who objects to what the terrorists did Thursday in Madrid cannot at the same time justify or overlook similar acts of terror against other nations."

II. "Welcome to the Real World"

Chief Economic Editor and senior columnist Sever Plotker wrote on page one of mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (March 8): "Welcome to the Europe of mega-terrorist attacks. First there was September 11. Now there is also March 11. Between one and the other, citizens of Indonesia, Kenya, Turkey, Russia and Iraq were massacred in mass terror attacks. But Western Europe, for some reason, thought itself protected. Immune. It won't happen to us, the Europeans said, we are not in terror's gun sights. After all, we are not part of imperialistic America or Russian imperialism and Zionist imperialism. We are enlightened, post-modern, progressive.... Now it has happened to them too.... People ask, why should al Qaida, or some organization affiliated with it, slaughter civilians in Madrid commuting to work? Experts are quick to respond: it is because of Spain's participation in the war in Iraq. What a stupid question and what a stupid answer. And what was al Qaida's motive in murdering 3,000 Americans who came to work at the World Trade Center in New York? At that time ... it even appeared that Bush was one of the more pro-Arab presidents of America.... The game of motive guessing leads nowhere. There is no logic here, what there is is seizing opportunities to murder as many people as possible. Let us pay attention to what British Prime Minister Tony Blair said in a prophetic speech a week ago: he said that for him, September 11 was a day of epiphany. He realized that zealots had declared unlimited war on our world.... Europe still refuses to internalize what happened. It still refuses to open its eyes wide and to accept the fact that as of this morning, every trip by any child to any school in Europe on public transportation is a trip into the heart of darkness, filled with fear and trembling. In Madrid as in Jerusalem."

III. "Crossing a Threshold"

Foreign News Editor Arik Bachar wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (March 12): "Bin Laden did to terrorism of the old kind -- that of the 70s and 80s -- exactly what Quentin Tarantino did to the shower scene of Alfred Hitchcock's 'Psycho'.... This is only going to get worse, because demons of this sort feed themselves and compete with one another. The next big target, a real irresistible temptation if you are a

terrorist on the way to establishing your reputation, is the Athens Olympic Games.... Thursday, Spain joined the expanding club of victims of mega-terrorism. Israelis always feel that the understanding for what has accompanied them since the very beginning is growing, as more blood of citizens of other nations entering that club is being spilled. But this is a double-edged sword. Finally, everybody remembers that international terrorism graduated in our neighborhood."

2. Mideast:

Summary:

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The significance of Sharon's outlook is broader -- the doctrine that the importance of territory is supreme has been called into question."

Diplomatic correspondent Herb Keinon wrote on page one of conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "Sharon is embarking on something that is completely untested, and he is doing it at a time when Bush least needs surprises."

Extreme right-wing columnist Caroline B. Glick wrote on page one of Jerusalem Post: "The [Greater Middle East Initiative] is low risk and entails a potentially enormous payoff. In sharp contrast, Sharon's plan is being advanced despite its high risks and unclear payoffs."

Block Quotes:

I. "Hints of Change?"

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (March 12): "Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's disengagement plan has not been finally formulated, but even now it is clear that with his plan, he has succeeded into calling into question tactical security doctrines that he held and also convinced many other people to support. The significant change that emerges from the disengagement plan is that Sharon has apparently concluded that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has no military solution.... The trouble is that there is no certainty at all that the conflict with the Palestinians has a political solution. This is what we learned during the tenures of previous prime ministers -- Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres and Ehud Barak. Today, too, the big question is whether the current Palestinian leadership, headed by Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat, wants to and is capable of arriving at a true political solution. For Sharon a fundamental change has occurred with respect to the security importance of the Jewish settlements in the territories. He is now adopting the outlook of Yitzhak Rabin and Haim Bar-Lev, who said that not all the settlements are important for the country's security.... The significance of Sharon's outlook is broader -- the doctrine that the importance of territory is supreme has been called into question."

II. "U.S. Planning Versus Israeli Improvisation"

Diplomatic correspondent Herb Keinon wrote on page one of conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (March 12): "Israel and the U.S. are currently in the midst of an intense round of shuttle consultancy.... What is emerging from these deliberations are two very different styles of doing things: U.S. planning vs. Israeli improvisation. The American penchant to try to plan for every eventuality against the Israeli tendency to wing it, to do things -- even very big things -- on the run. Nowhere has this Israeli modus operandi been more apparent than in the manner in which the country is going about building the fence -- first build, then chart the route.... This time the Bush administration wants, is demanding, to see the details, the fine print.... This time around, the Americans want to leave as little to chance or Israeli improvisation as possible. For good reason -- it's a gamble, and nine months before a close election, President George W. Bush is not in a gambling mood. Sharon is embarking on something that is completely untested, and he is doing it at a time when Bush least needs surprises."

III. "Even Worse Than Oslo"

Extreme right-wing columnist Caroline B. Glick wrote on

page one of Jerusalem Post (March 12): "In many respects Oslo was better than what Sharon is currently advocating.... The most stunning aspect of this plan is the fact that it is being advanced at the same time as another Middle East peace plan that actually could bring about a long term change for the better in our region. This plan, the Bush administration's Greater Middle East Initiative, involves pressuring Arab dictatorships like Egypt's to democratize. The very existence of the U.S. initiative has already caused shockwaves throughout the Arab world.... If successful, it will advance U.S. national security interests in the region by drying up the swamps of extremism that flourish in the darkness of totalitarian regimes. If it fails, the U.S. is no worse off than it is today. That is, the plan is low risk and entails a potentially enormous payoff. In sharp contrast, Sharon's plan is being advanced despite its high risks and unclear payoffs.... It emboldens the Europeans and it pushes the U.S. into a position where in the interests of 'progress' in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict it will be forced to undermine a plan that can actually bring peace."

KURTZER